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Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 NEA-10 ADP-00 PM-07 H-02 INR-10 L-03

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4245
INFO WHITE HOUSE
CIA
AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH
AMEMBASSY SAIGON
AMEMBASSY WARSAW
CINCPAC
CINCUSARPAC
CINCPACAF
CINCPACFLT
DEPCHJUSMAGTHAI
CDR USSAG NKP
CDR 13 AF ADVON UDORN
USDEL JEC PARIS
SECDEF

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 VIENTIANE 3890

SAIGON PASS AMBASSADOR SULLIVAN

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MOPS, PGOV, PINS, PINT, PFOR, MARR, MASS,
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MCAP, LA, US, NV, XC
SUBJECT: A THREE- MONTH PERSPECTIVE ON LAO CEASEFIRE

REF: VIENTIANE 3059

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BEGIN SUMMARY: IN THE THREE MONTHS SINCE THE SIGNING OF THE VIENTIANE AGREEMENT, THE LAOS CEASEFIRE HAS BECOME PROGRESSIVELY MORE EFFECTIVE. THIS FACT IS STRIKINGLY ILLUSTRATED BY REDUCED NUMBERS OF INCIDENTS, FRIENDLY AND ENEMY CASUALTIES, ARTILLERY EXPENDITURES, RLAF COMBAT SORTIE RATES AND CONTRACTOR AIR SUPPORT FLYING HOURS, WHILE MINOR SKIMISHES AND ENEMY ATTACKS BY FIRE CONTINUE SPORADICALLY, THERE HAS BEEN NO MAJOR FIGHTING IN LAOS SINCE MID- APRIL. POLITICALLY, NEGOTIATIONS HAVE BOGGED DOWN, AS LPF-- PRESUMABLY AWAITING DEVELOPMENTS ELSEWHERE IN INDOCHINA-- DELAY IN TALKS ON FORMATION OF A NEW GOVERNMENT. LPF SPECIAL ADVISOR PHOUMI, WHO RE-TURNED TO VIENTIANE IN LATE APRIL, HAS OFFERED NO MATERIAL CONCESSIONS IN NEGOTIATIONS, THE LPF HAS TURNED IN-CREASINGLY TO PUBLICIZING ITS POSITIONS, SUGGESTING THAT THEY HAVE MOVED INTO A PROPAGANDA PHASE. THERE IS STILL LITTLE SIGN OF ANY CONCERTED LPF PROGRAM OF POLITICAL AGITATION. PRIMIN SOUVANNA HAS ATTAINED POLITICAL EQUILIB-RIUM ON THE RLG SIDE AND APPEARS ABLE TO WITHSTAND WHAT-EVER CHALLENGES THE RECONVENED NATIONAL ASSEMBLY MIGHT POSE. END SUMMARY

I. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. THE GENERAL TREND PORTRAYED IN PREVIOUS MESSAGES PERSISTS-- THE OVERALL FREQUENCY AND INTENSITY OF MILITARY HOSTILITIES THROUGHOUT LAOS CONTINUES TO DECLINE. THE FOLLOWING SHORT TABULAR SUMMARIES ILLUMINATE THIS TREND:

(A) IN THE FIRST 12 WEEKS OF THE CEASEFIRE, 727 VIOLATIONS ON THE GROUND HAVE BEEN RECORDED; 109 HAVE INVOLVED MULTI- COMPANY ATTACKS OR HEAVY SHELLINGS. (INITIAL FIGURES FOR THE 13 TH WEEK REFLECT AN UPSWING TO 3 4. INCIDENTS.)

	FIRST FOUR WEEKS	SECOND FOUR WEEKS	THIRD FOUR WEEKS

TOTAL INCIDENTS	455	191	81

(B) THE REDUCED INTENSITY OF COMBAT IS INDICATED IN THE FOLLOWING TABLE OF FRIENDLY/ ENEMY KILLED IN ACTION AS REPORTED BY GROUND OBSERVERS:

	FIRST FOUR WEEKS	SECOND FOUR WEEKS	THIRD FOUR WEEKS
FRD KIA	160	72	32
EN KIA	18 6	104	8

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(C) REPORTED FRIENDLY ARTILLERY (105 AND 155 MM HOWITZER) EXPENDITURES ALSO REFLECT SUBSTANTIAL DECREASE IN LEVEL OF COMBAT ACTIVITY SINCE 22 FEBRUARY:

	FIRST FOUR WEEKS	SECOND FOUR WEEKS	THIRD FOUR WEEKS
ROUNDS	3,695 #	2,692	136

THE BULK OF THESE FIRINGS, APART FROM SOME TRAINING EXPENDITURES, HAVE OCCURRED IN SOUTH LAOS (MR' S III AND IV).

(D) ANOTHER INDICATOR OF MARKEDLY DIMINISHED MILITARY ACTIVITY IS RLAF COMBAT SORTIE RATES SINCE THE CEASEFIRE:

	FIRST FOUR WEEKS	SECOND FOUR WEEKS	THIRD FOUR WEEKS
T-28	943	252	148
AC-47	87	68	18
TOTAL	03030	320	166

THESE COMBAT SORITE RATES CORRELATE DIRECTLY WITH THE LEVEL OF FIGHTING ON THE GROUND. NEARLY ALL WERE FLOWN IN SUPPORT OF TROOPS IN CONTACT OR AS RETALIATION AGAINST
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NEARBY ENEMY LOCATIONS FROM WHICH ATTACKS WERE SUSPECTED TO HAVE ORGINATED. THE ABOVE DEPICTED DROP IN RLAF COMBAT SORTIES HAS RSAOCTED IN SIZEABLE SAVINGS TO
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INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 NEA-10 ADP-00 PM-07 H-02 INR-10 L-03

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

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4. THREE MONTHS AFTER THE CEASEFIRE, NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO LAO PARTIES ON THE FORMATION OF A NEW COALITION GOVERNMENT REMAIN AT AN IMPASSE, CONSEQUENTLY, THE CLOCK HAS NOT BEGUN TO TICK TOWARD MAKING OPERATIVE SUCH ASPECTS OF THE VIENTIANE AGREEMENT AS THE WITH-DRAWAL OF FOREIGN FORCES AND THE RESOLUTION OF THE STATUS OF MIA' S. HOPES THAT THE RETURN OF LPF SPECIAL ADVISOR PHOUMI VONGVICHIT IN LATE APRIL MIGHT HERALD COMMENCE-MENT OF SERIOUS NEGOTIATIONS HAVE NOT YET BEEN BORNE OUT. PHOUMI SAID HE HAD ARRIVED IN VIENTIANE WITH SPECIAL POWERS AND A MANDATE FROM SAM NEUA TO " SPUR" NEGOTIATIONS TOWARD A SPEEDY SIGNING OF A PROTOCOL TO THE VIENTIANE AGREEMENT. SINCE HIS RETURN, PHOUMI HAS MET SEVERAL TIMES WITH THE PRIME MINISTER, HAS HAD NINE NEGOTIATING MEETING WITH HIS RLG COUNTERPART PHENG PHONGSAVAN, AND HAS PRESENTED A REVISED LPF DRAFT PROTOCOL WHICH EMBODIES NO MATERIAL CONCESSIONS . THE LPF CONTINUES TO INSIST THAT ALL POLITICAL AND MILITARY QUESTIONS BE SETTLED BEFORE ANY ASPECT OF THE AGREEMENT IS IMPLEMENTED. IT IS ALSO STEADFAST IN MAKING DEMANDS UNACCEPTABLE TO THE RLG ON THE DISTRIBUTION OF PORTFOLIOS IN THE NEW GOVERNMENT, ON THE POSITION OF DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND ON STATION-ING ITS TROOPS NEAR LUANG PRABANG AND VIENTIANE TO PROTECT

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ITS MINISTERS AFTER THE NEW GOVERNMENT IS FORMED. MORE NETTLESOME, THE LPF IS UNYIELDING IN ADVANCING PROPOSALS WHICH, IN EFFECT, WOULD PERPETUATE AN LPF ZONE IMMUNE TO RLG INFLUENCE. THIS LATTER POSITION IS FUNDAMENTALLY INCOMPATIBLE WITH THE PRIME MINISTER' S DESIRE TO AVOID PARTITION OF THE KINGDOM AND TO PROVIDE FOR REINTEGRATION OF ALL LAO INTO ONE NATIONAL COMMUNITY.

5. WHILE THE LPF HAS NOT SUBSTANTIVELY CHANGED ITS NEGOTIATING POSITION, IT HAS APPARENTLY CHOSEN TO " GO PUBLIC" IN NEGOTIATIONS, PRESUMABLY WITH A VIEW TO SCORING PROPAGANDA POINTS. IN EARLY MAY, THE LPF ISSUED A COMMUNIQUE, CALLING FOR RESUMPTION OF THE WEEKLY DELEGATION TALKS, WHICH HAD PREVIOUSLY SERVED AS LITTLE MORE THAN A PROPAGANDA SOUNDING BOARD. LPF NEGOTIATOR PHOUN SIPRASEUTH HIMSELF RECENTLY ASSETED THAT THE LPF FINDS IT NECESSARY TO ORGANIZE PERIODIC PRESS CONFERENCES TO KEEP THE PUBLIC INFORMED, AND MOSCOW RADIO HAS EVEN
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BROADCAST ACCOUNTS OF THE LPF' S " EIGHT POINTS PROPOSAL," CONVEYED IN ITS MOST RECENT REVISION OF THE PROTOCOL. AFP HAS OBTAINED EXCERPTS OF THE " EIGHT POINTS" FROM THE LPF ON A BACKGROUND BASIS. THIS ALL SUGGESTS THAT THE LPF IS IN A PROPAGANDA RATHER THAN NEGOTIATING STAGE OF STRUGGLE.

6. CLEARLY, PROGRESS IN THE NEGOTIATIONS AND TIMING ON THE FORMATION OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT STILL DEPEND PRINCIPALLY ON HANOI' S READINESS TO FACILITATE A SETTLEMENT IN LAOS. THAT READINESS IS, IN TURN, RELATED TO DEVELOPMENTS ELSEWHERE IN INDOCHINA; AND, FOR THIS REASON, BOTH LPF AND RLG HAVE BEEN AWAITING THE OUTCOME OF THE KISSINGER/ LE DUC THO TALKS. MEANWHILE, PHOUMI' S PRESENCE IN VIENTIANE SERVES PRINCIPALLY AS AN ASSURANCE THAT IF HANOI GIVES THE SIGNAL TO PROCEED, CHANNELS DO EXIST FOR RESUMPTION OF SERIOUS NEGOTIATIONS ON DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE LAO PARTIES.

7. THREE MONTHS AFTER THE CEASEFIRE, THERE IS STILL LITTLE SIGN OF ANY CONCERTED LPF CAMPAIGN OF POLITICAL AGITATION, PROSELYTIZATION OR TERRORIST ACTIVITY DESIGNED TO CONTEST CONTROL OVER PEOPLE IN THE RLG ZONE. FLAG RAISING INCIDENTS HAVE VIRTUALLY HALTED, ALTHOUGH THERE ARE OCCASIONAL REPORTS OF ISOLATED FORAYS BY LPF MEDICAL AND PROPAGANDA TEAMS INTO SOME RUAL VILLAGES. IN VIENTIANE, THE LPF HAS ATTEMPTED TO OPEN LINES INTO THE BUDDHIST COMMUNITY AND HAS ALSO DISTRIBUTED SOME PROPAGANDA LITERATURE AT THE LOCAL INSTITUTE OF LAW AND ADMINISTRATION. IT HAS ALSO PROSELYTIZED WITH KEY NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEPUTIES, ALTHOUGH CONTINUING TO DENOUNCE THE ASSEMBLY AS A RIGHT- WING, NOT NATIONAL,

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INSTITUTION. THESE EFFORTS HAVE BEEN LOW KEY TO DATE AND WE CANNOT YET ASSESS THEIR EFFECTIVENESS. RLG PREPARATIONS TO COUNTER THE PUTATIVE LPF POLITICAL CAMPAIGN HAVE THEMSELVES NOT REALLY GOTTEN OFF THE GROUND.

8. INTERNAL POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN VIENTIANE BLEND IN WELL AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF INACTIVITY IN NEGOTIATIONS. CONSERVATIVES HAVE MUTED THEIR INITIAL CRITICISMS OF THE VIENTIANE AGREEMENT, AND, AT LEAST FOR CONFIDENTIAL

NOW, SEEM DISPOSED TO FOLLOW SOUVANNA' S LEADERSHIP. THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, WHICH BEGAN ITS ANNUAL FIVE- MONTH SESSION ON MAY 11, MAY POSE NEW CHALLENGES, PARTICULARLY BY REASSERTING REQUESTS THAT SOUVANNA SUBMIT VIENTIANE AGREEMENT TO IT FOR APPROVAL. WE EXPECT, HOWEVER, THAT PRIME MINISTER WILL BE ABLE TO WORK OUT SOME FORMULA TO SATISFY DEPUTIES AND KEEP ADEQUATE REIN ON THE SANANIKONE FACTION, WHICH CONTROLS THE ASSEMBLY.

III. CONCLUSIONS

9. THUS, BY ALL FACTORS WE CAN ATTEMPT TO MEASURE, COMBAT ACTIVITY CONTINUES ITS OVERALL DECLINE. THE CEASEFIRE HAS INCREASINGLY TAKEN HOLD, EXCEPT FOR RECENT FLURRIES OF ACTIVITY SOUTH/ SOUTHEAST OF PAKSE AND EAST OF SAVANNAKEHT. THE LATTER IS MORE WORRISOME, FOR IT MAY AUGUR A RENEWED ENEMY PUSH AGAINST THE PREVIOUSLY REMARKABLY STABLE FRONT LINE AT MUONG PHALANE. IT IS TOO EARLY TO DIVINE ENEMY INTENTIONS IN EITHER AREA, BUT FIRNEDLY REINFORCEMENT IN THE FORMER AND CONTINUED PRESENCE IN THE LATTER KEEP OPEN THE POSSIBILITY OF FURTHER FIGHTING THERE. EVEN THOUGHT SCATTERED FIGHTING PERSISTS, BOTH SIDES APPEAR LARGELY SATISFIED WITH, OR RECONCILED TO, TERRAIN THEY NOW CONTROL. THE DIMINUTION OF HOSTILITIES HAS ALREADY YIELDED CEASE-FIRE DIVIDENDS TO LAOS AND TO U. S., IN BOTH HUMAN AND MATERIAL TERMS. AS THE MILITARY SITUATION AS QUIETED, THE POLITICAL NEGOTIATIONS HAVE REACHED A STALEMATE. DELAYS IN NEGOTIATING FORMATION OF A NEW COALITION GOVERNMENT DEFER FULL REALIZATION OF BENEFITS OF STABLE PEACE. THESE DELAYS, APPARENTLY CAUSED BY HANOI, WILL PRESUMABLY CONTINUE UNTIL A NEGOTIATING SITUATION EMERGES IN CAMBODIA AND MORE SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS IS MADE ON IMPLEMENTING THE VIETNAM AGREEMENT. MEANWHILE, PRIMIN SOUVANNA WILL SEEK TO AVOID RUPTURING THE FABRIC OF PEACE THAT HAS EVOLVED AND SEEK TO MAINTAIN THE POLITICAL EQULIBRIUM HE HAS ACHIEVED ON THE RLG SIDE IN ORDER TO PRESERVE THE CHANCE FOR UNIFYING LAOS.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
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Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: n/a
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Decaption Note:
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Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
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Executive Order: N/A
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Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 6
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: VIENTIANE 3059
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: garlanwa
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 24 OCT 2001
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <07-Aug-2001 by boyleja>; APPROVED <09-Oct-2001 by willialc>; RELEASED <24-Oct-2001 by kelleyw0>; APPROVED <09-Nov-2001 by garlanwa>
Review Markings:

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Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: <DBA CORRECTED> gwr 980305
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TAGS: MARR, MASS, MOPS, PFOR, PGOV, PINS, PINT, LA, PINT
To: STATE INFO WHITE HOUSE
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